

# what's up?

## INFORMATION FOR ADULTS WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

### What's it all about?

Adolescence brings changes in young people's thought processes, self-concepts and social and emotional development. Between the ages of 10 and 15, young people begin to think abstractly and thoughtfully, leading them to question rules, boundaries and social norms. They learn new social skills and how to cope with the excitement and confusion that comes with the rapid physical changes of puberty. Their own appearance and their relationships with friends take on greater importance. Their interest in their own sexuality awakens.

Like their bodies, young people's minds and emotional/social aspects develop at different rates during adolescence. This variation and diversity is natural between genders and individuals.

### Why does it matter?

Adolescence is an important time of transition into adulthood.

- It's a time to work toward autonomy—in emotions, behavior and values.
- It can be a time of egocentrism (too much focus on oneself) and sensitivity to apparent contradictions ("these rules apply to you, but not to me") leading to conflicts with parents and other adults.
- Emotional maturity develops in different stages than physical maturity, so it is helpful to recognize the signs of both.

### What are the details?

	Early: Transition to adolescence and puberty	Middle: Essence of adolescence, strong peer group influence
<b>Autonomy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• challenge authority; anti-parent</li> <li>• loneliness</li> <li>• wide mood swings</li> <li>• rejection of childhood things</li> <li>• argumentative and disobedient</li> <li>• desire for more privacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• family conflicts predominate due to ambivalence about emerging independence</li> </ul>
<b>Body Image</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• preoccupation with physical changes</li> <li>• critical of appearance</li> <li>• anxieties about physical signs of puberty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased efforts to improve appearance</li> <li>• excessive physical activity alternating with lethargy</li> </ul>
<b>Peer Groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• serve a developmental purpose</li> <li>• intense friendships with same sex</li> <li>• contact with opposite sex in groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strong peer allegiances</li> <li>• fad behavior</li> <li>• sexual drives emerge</li> <li>• interest in dating</li> </ul>
<b>Identity Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "am I normal?"</li> <li>• daydreaming</li> <li>• vocational goals change frequently</li> <li>• begin to develop own value system</li> <li>• emerging sexual feelings/exploration</li> <li>• desire for more privacy</li> <li>• magnify own problems; "no one understands"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• experimentation—sex, drugs, friends, jobs, risk-taking behaviors</li> <li>• more realistic vocational goals</li> <li>• begin to realize strengths and limitations</li> <li>• increased intellectual ability and creativity</li> </ul>

## EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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#### What can I do?

The best thing adults can do to help teens grow positively throughout their emotional development is to know and understand what to expect and to offer support and understanding to the teens in their lives.

- Learn about adolescent development. There are many excellent books, brochures and websites. Also see the resources below.
- Share what you know with teens to provide reassurance, such as information about how each teen grows at a different rate.
- As a parent, show your love and support. Teens need a strong sense of belonging and to feel they are part of something. If they don't get it from healthy places (family, youth groups, sports, clubs) they might look to gangs, cults, or friends you consider inappropriate.
- Strive for open communication. Create an environment where teens feel safe in discussing sensitive subjects with you. In well-functioning families, teens have a voice. They might not always have a vote, but they have a voice!
- Look for other strong adult relationships in a young person's life—including teachers, coaches, and providers.
- Create opportunities to help adolescents be strong advocates for their own care and savvy consumers of health care. Teach them to go to their health care providers by themselves and ask questions directly.
- Understand limits of what health information can or cannot be shared from an adolescent's health care provider.
- Acknowledge the positive social aspects of adolescence. Teens get a bad rap with a focus on the difficult issues, while the positives are forgotten or ignored.
- If you don't want the teen in your life to do something, don't do it yourself. Teens have sensitive antennae for hypocrisy and they use them.
- This is a time for risk taking. Help teens take positive risks like climbing a mountain.

#### Am I there yet?

##### Late adolescence into adulthood

Teens approaching the end of high school find themselves transitioning to an independent, adult role. What does this mean? Here are a few indicators:

- Increased autonomy—making decisions about higher education, work and adult responsibilities
- Usually being comfortable with body image
- Decisions/values are less influenced by peers
- Greater goal-setting capacity
- Selection of a partner based on individual preference
- More realistic vocational goals
- Relating to family as an adult
- Realization of own limitations and mortality
- Establishment of sexual identity
- Establishment of value system
- Capability of intimate and complex relationships
- Understanding of the consequences of behavior
- Social and cultural traditions regain some of their previous importance.

**hot  
links!**

##### American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Facts for Families

Normal Adolescent Development: Middle School and Early High School Years (Fact Sheet #57)—

[www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/develop.htm](http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/develop.htm)

Late High School Years and Beyond (Fact Sheet #58)—[www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/develop2.htm](http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/develop2.htm)

##### All Family Resources Website

"Normality"—[www.familymanagement.com/facts/english/facts22.html](http://www.familymanagement.com/facts/english/facts22.html)

Adolescent Development—[www.familymanagement.com/facts/english/facts57.html](http://www.familymanagement.com/facts/english/facts57.html)

##### Bright Futures

Fact Sheet for Health Care Providers—[www.brightfutures.org/adolescence/adtoe.htm](http://www.brightfutures.org/adolescence/adtoe.htm)

Early Adolescents Visits—[www.brightfutures.org/adolescence/eaframe.htm](http://www.brightfutures.org/adolescence/eaframe.htm)

##### Other Resources

Center for Continuing Education in Adolescent Health, Children's Hospital Medical Center, Cincinnati

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